



**Global Centre for  
Modern Ageing**



# Telehealth - Here To Stay?

KEY INSIGHTS FROM AN EXPANSIVE STUDY  
INTO AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

JUNE 2020

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*To secure telehealth's success into the future it is crucial that telehealth platforms are easy to use, enable the delivery of high-quality care and support a positive experience for patients and health providers.*

*Older Australians have told us that telehealth is generally working well for them. Almost two-thirds of respondents feel confident to use telehealth and are willing to use telehealth into the future.* ”

- Prof Justin Beilby,  
General Practitioner and GCMA Advisor

## Foreword



From disruption comes opportunity. While COVID-19 has been hugely challenging, it has also driven a technological leap. Telehealth has emerged as a key element Australians would like to retain post-pandemic.

During this unprecedented time, the Global Centre for Modern Ageing is reaching out to Australians as part of an expansive study to understand their evolving experience during the pandemic.

One thing is abundantly clear - while there are many elements people hope will return to “normal”, there are also changes they see value in retaining. Telehealth is one. During the pandemic, Australians have used telehealth for a range of general practitioner and specialist appointments. Now many older Australians have told us they feel confident and willing to use telehealth in the future.

With telehealth arguably “here to stay”, we are committed to understanding best telehealth practice for older patients. This encompasses exploring what constitutes an optimal experience for patients and health professionals; and ways to improve the choices available and the quality of the end-to-end telehealth experience for all involved.

A forward-thinking boldness is needed if we are to enable older people to live their very best lives. I invite you to contact the GCMA to find out more about our work in the telehealth space.



**Julianne Parkinson**

Chief Executive Officer

Global Centre for Modern Ageing

## Key findings

### Finding: Older Australians feel confident and willing to use telehealth in the future.

67%

More than two in three Australians (67%) aged over 60 who have used telehealth during the pandemic feel *confident* to use it in the future.

62%

62% of older Australians who have used telehealth during the pandemic say they are *willing* to use it in the future.

49%

Nearly half (49%) of older Australians who used telehealth during the pandemic say they are *likely* to use it *after* the pandemic.

32%

Irrespective of previous telehealth use, nearly one-third (32%) of older Australians say they are *likely* to use telehealth after the pandemic.

290

One in five older Australians (20%) reported taking part in an *online* appointment or consultation with a health professional during COVID-19.

90%

90% of Australians aged over 60 who took part in an online telehealth appointment or consultation found booking the appointment the same (73%) or better (17%) than a normal consultation.

85%

85% of older Australians who took part in an online telehealth appointment or consultation found it easy (34%) or very easy (51%) to log in or set up their online appointment.

+

Access to telephone - as well as online - appointments is important. Older Australians aged 60 and over were more likely than younger Australians to have taken part in a telephone telehealth appointment or consultation during the pandemic (44% versus 33%).

# Key findings

Finding: **Most older Australians found their telehealth experience to be similar to or better than a face-to-face consultation.**

For phone and online consultations, 85% of older Australians said the quality of care/treatment provided was the *same or better* than normal.

85%

For phone and online consultations, 88% of older Australians said the value for money was the *same or better* than they usually experienced.

88%



## Key findings

Finding: **Privacy does not appear to be a major concern for most older Australians using telehealth.**

95%

For online consultations, 83% of older Australians said the privacy of appointment was the *same as normal*, and 12% said it was *better than normal*.

97%

For phone consultations, 89% of older Australians said privacy was the *same as normal* and 8% said it was *better than normal*.

Finding: **There are some concerns and difficulties using telehealth that should be addressed going forward.**

38%

38 percent of Australians aged over 60 experienced some concerns and difficulties using telehealth. Issues included:

- An inability to have a problem examined/receive usual treatment
- A less personal experience due to lack of body language and cues, less perceived warmth and less perceived care
- Challenges for people with hearing impairment
- Awkwardness, especially with a new clinician
- Tech glitches, lack of appropriate tech and lack of tech confidence.

# Firsthand experience

Finding: It is vital telehealth providers and clinicians understand people's varying needs and circumstances.

*"I did not have to travel to the appointment or sit and wait for my name to be called, they rang me."*

**Female  
Aged  
65-69**

*"It was quite a rewarding experience online as I could devote most of my time on my case (rather) than flounder or let my attention float around. I was able to focus / concentrate on my talks with my GP."*

**Male  
Aged  
65-69**

*"As a carer I found it difficult supporting my partner (to) provide medical information ... all verbally. For someone with hearing loss and some confusion, the lack of a visual connection made the consultation difficult."*

**Female  
Aged  
70-74**

*"An online appointment is not going to be as thorough as an actual visit to the doctor."*

**Male  
Aged  
70-74**

*"First appointment was with a replacement doctor, I didn't like the appointment. (It) was a phone call only. (The) doctor didn't really know my history. Second was (an) online video chat with a specialist. (They) knew about my issues and helped that I could see him live."*

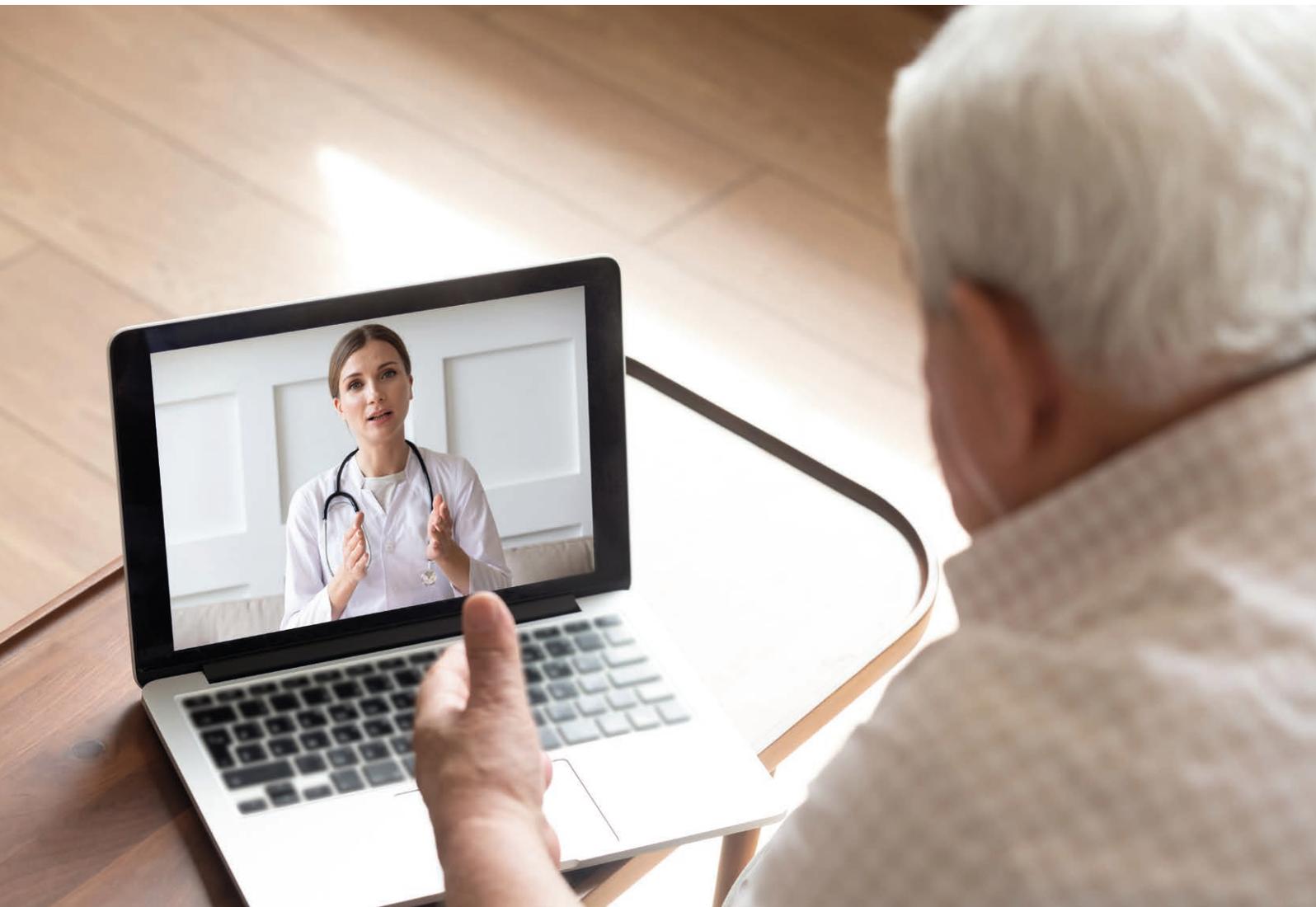
**Male  
Aged  
60-64**



## Opportunity for industry: **Evolve telehealth for older Australians**

The disruption created by the pandemic has presented a unique opening for telehealth to leap forward. The positive sentiment for telehealth has created a window for the industry to secure its uptake and success into the future by designing and delivering services to meet older people's needs and address their challenges.

Older Australians like telehealth for its convenience, reduced travel and ability to be conducted at home. Improvements they suggested include making telehealth more available, improving tech, and providing more information around the end-to-end process, including scripts, follow-ups and referrals.





## Opportunity for industry: **Empower Australians to help themselves.**



The Global Centre for Modern Ageing is investing its specialised co-design methods, co-design models and state-of-the-art resources into mapping the journeys of patient and health providers when using telehealth. We are building a deeper understanding of how varying technology platforms impact and/or enhance the telehealth experience for older patients and those providing health care and advice.

Our research will enable us to compare and contrast the experience of older patients engaging in face-to-face health appointments - which will remain an integral component of health care - versus the experience of appointments and consultations delivered over the telephone or digitally. As telehealth evolves to become a regular component of many people's health and wellbeing management, our insights will help to inform the design of telehealth products and services for older people.

## The broader conversation: A global change

There has been a rapid take up of telehealth in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Australia, one in six adults aged 18 years and over (17%) used a telehealth service during early-April to early-May, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. To provide greater context to our research, below are some perspectives from other studies and published pieces.

*“The momentum is such that telehealth will almost certainly find a stronger place within health service frameworks ... and is likely to have increased acceptance among both patients and health care providers.”* - Telehealth in the Context of COVID-19: Changing Perspectives in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research, Vol 22, No 6 (2020): June.

*“With the acceleration of consumer and provider adoption of telehealth and extension of telehealth beyond virtual urgent care, up to US\$250 billion of current US health care spend could potentially be virtualised. This shift is not inevitable. It will require new ways of working for a broad set of providers, step-change improvements in information exchange, and broadening access and integration of technology. The potential impact is improved convenience and access to care, better patient outcomes, and a more efficient health care system. Health care players may consider moves now that support such a shift and improve their future position.”* - Telehealth: A quarter-trillion-dollar post-COVID-19 reality? Published by McKinsey & Company.

*“Telehealth can be more time efficient, saves travel, has fewer missed appointments and is well suited to clients who find it safer or more convenient,”* Dr Katherine Harding, La Trobe academic and manager of the Allied Health Clinical Research Office at Eastern Health, who co-led a team investigating the early telehealth experiences of over 130 clinicians and managers at Eastern Health, Victoria, Australia.



# About the research

## Aim

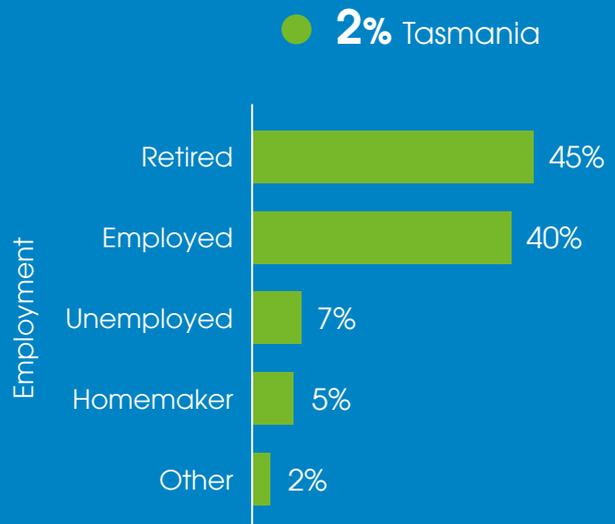
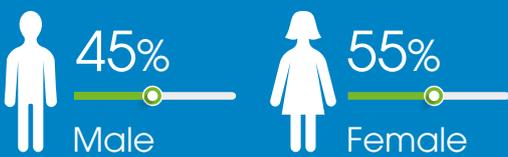
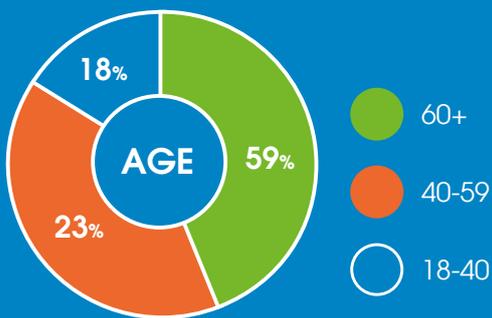
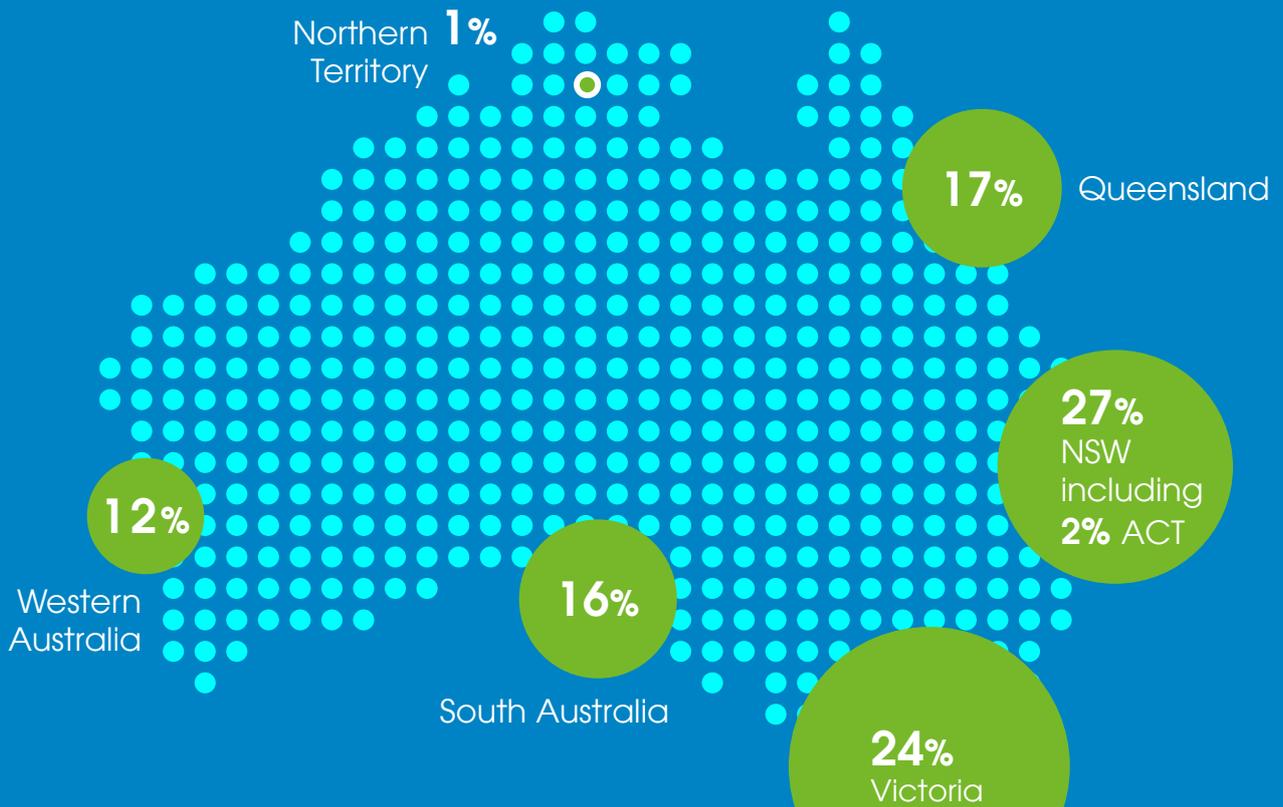
The aim of this research is to understand the evolving experience of Australians during the coronavirus pandemic.

The results in this report are drawn from the second component of a larger multi-faceted study to gauge how people are adapting to and navigating changes during this unique period. Our second survey in this research series focused on telehealth to better understand the experiences of those who have engaged with telehealth services during COVID-19.

## Methodology

Through an online survey, the Global Centre for Modern Ageing received insights from 1,242 Australian adults (18 years and over). The survey was open from 19 May - 31 May 2020.

# The sample



## Questions about the research?

If you would like to know more, please contact our  
COVID-19 research team leads :

- **Dr Amy Wilson** at [amy.wilson@gcma.net.au](mailto:amy.wilson@gcma.net.au)
- **Dylan Lee** at [dylan.lee@gcma.net.au](mailto:dylan.lee@gcma.net.au)

### What's next?

This report is the second of a multi-staged piece into the effects of  
the COVID-19 pandemic on Australian life.

To be part of the research, please sign up at  
[gcma.net.au/covid19/research](https://gcma.net.au/covid19/research)

# About GCMA

The Global Centre for Modern Ageing (GCMA) serves as a leading response to the international ageing phenomenon.

Modern ageing sparks an inclusive future that engages people throughout the whole of life's course to participate and belong in the ways they value.

The GCMA provides world class research, advisory, advocacy and living lab services for governments, businesses and organisations. We help to improve the development of products, services and solutions, and to understand the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing demographic landscape.

The GCMA is a not-for-profit organisation that provides national and global clients with an independent, specialist and internationally acclaimed service offering.

Led by CEO Julianne Parkinson, the GCMA and its LifeLab network includes a product and technology testing environment facilitating user co-design, located in South Australia's Tonsley Innovation District.

The GCMA's team of international subject matter experts includes:

- Health and wellbeing research
- Global digital health
- Artificial intelligence and the human interface
- Gerontology

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